

# Harriet Tubman Reader's Theater

## Harriet Tubman and the Road to Freedom

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*Use this multiple-role reader's theater script to learn about Harriet Tubman, an American hero, and to learn about a challenging time period in American History. Find out more about [The Underground Railroad](#).*

### Roles:

1. \*Narrator 1
2. \*Narrator 2
3. \*Harriet Tubman, a slave
4. \*Ma, Harriet's mother
5. \*Pa, Harriet's father
6. Overseer, the person in charge of field slaves
7. Runaway slave
8. Benjie, Harriet's brother
9. John, Harriet's brother
10. William, Harriet's brother
11. Catherine, William's wife
12. Ezekiel (ee-ZEEK-ee-il) Hunn, a Quaker who helped runaway slaves
13. Eliza Hunn, Ezekiel's wife
14. William Still, secretary of the Anti-Slavery Society in Pennsylvania
15. Doe Thompson, Harriet's old master

\*starred names are major roles

### SCENE I

NARRATOR 1: Harriet Tubman is a slave in Maryland who will grow up to lead more than 300 people out of bondage over the course of her life.

NARRATOR 2: As a teenager in the 1830s, Harriet hates her cruel master and dreams of freedom.

She also discovers that she has a special talent for sensing danger.

NARRATOR 1: Harriet is working with other slaves to harvest corn one autumn evening, when she notices that one slave has stopped working. She knows something is up.

Runaway slave: (Whispering)

Tonight is my night. While y'all are busy with the harvest, I'll make a break for it.

NARRATOR 2: Harriet admires his bravery, but she senses grave danger. She sees the overseer follow him. She hides herself in the corn field and follows too.

RUNAWAY SLAVE: He's after me - but I can hide in the general store at the crossroads.

NARRATOR 1: Harriet and the overseer both follow him into the store.

Overseer: You, girl! Help me, catch this runaway!

NARRATOR 2: Instead, Harriet 'stands in the doorway as the runaway dashes out. She blocks the entrance so the overseer can't chase him.

OVERSEER: I'll get you!

NARRATOR 1: The overseer picks up a heavy weight and throws it with all his might at the escaping slave. He misses him - but it hits ,Harriet in the forehead. She has a huge wound.

MA: Oh, my God. Can our girl survive this?

PA: She's strong. She'll make it.

## SCENE 2

NARRATOR 2: Harriet does not wake up for weeks, but her father is right. She survives.

NARRATOR 1: For the rest of her life, Harriet has a dent in her skull from the injury. She often wears scarves on her head to conceal it.

NARRATOR 2: Harriet does not forget the slave who got away that day. Like him, she yearns for freedom. She learns about the Underground Railroad, which is neither underground nor a railroad. It is a secret network of people, black and white who help slaves in the South escape to the North.

NARRATOR 1: When she is in her 20s, Harriet successfully makes it all the way to Pennsylvania. She is a free woman, at last. But somehow her freedom does not seem so sweet. She is alone.

NARRATOR 2: Harriet knows she won't be happy until her family is also free. She hears her brothers are about to be sold to a plantation in the Deep South.

She has to act fast. Harriet risks her freedom and her life by going back to Maryland.

### SCENE 3

NARRATOR 1: After a long and dangerous trip, Harriet arrives at her brothers' cabins. William's wife, Catherine, is there too.

JOHN: Harriet! You've come back!

HARRIET: I've come to bring you with me to the land of freedom. We have to leave soon.

BENJIE: Harriet, it's freezing cold outside!

CATHERINE: And Master will surely hunt us down.

WILLIAM: We can't make it all the way North.

HARRIET: I've done it myself, and now I have friends along the way who can help us.

BENJIE: We're supposed to be having dinner with Ma and Pa. They'll be wondering about us.

HARRIET: We can't tell Ma about our plan. She'll start crying and screaming, and then everybody will know I've come for you.

JOHN: Why can't Ma and Pa come with us?

HARRIET: They are very old and can't move quickly. I will come back for them when I can get a horse and a wagon.

CATHERINE: You mean we're going to walk all the way to the North?

HARRIET: We will go however we can. We will run through the forest, sleep in bushes, eat berries. But we have to leave before tomorrow morning.

BENJIE: Harriet, we have to let our parents know that we are running away.

HARRIET: Let's go hide in the shed, and then we'll get word to Pa.

### Scene 4

NARRATOR 2: Ma and Pa are in their cabin, waiting.

MA: Where are my boys? Why haven't they come for supper? Have they been sent South already?

PA: I don't know, Ma.

MA: It breaks my heart they are not here. What if they ran off and got caught?

PA: Let's hope they are safe.

NARRATOR 1: A friend knocks at the door and whispers to Pa. They sneak away from Pa's cabin and arrive at the shed.

NARRATOR 2: Pa ties a handkerchief around his eyes.

HARRIET: Pa, it's me, Harriet!

NARRATOR 1: He grabs his daughter and holds,her tight.

PA: Children, I'll come back with some food for you. Can I bring your mother to see you?

HARRIET: It's better for her if she doesn't know where we are.

WILLIAM: Pa, why in the world are you blindfolded?

PA: You know I don't ever tell any lies. When the Master comes and asks me if I know where my boys went, I can honestly say, "I did not see them."

NARRATOR 2: Pa squeezes Harriet's hand.

HARRIET: Pa, I promise I'll come back soon for you and Ma.

### Scene 5

NARRATOR 1: It is late at night. Harriet leads the group through the woods.

CATHERINE: Harriet, it's so dark. How do you know where we're going?

HARRIET: Look up there in the sky That's the North Star. We can use that star to guide us.

NARRATOR 2: After walking all night, with no rest and little food, they arrive at a house with green shutters.

NARRATOR 1: The group hides in the bushes. Harriet knocks on the door.

EZEKIEL: Who is it?

NARRATOR 2: Harriet says the secret password.

HARRIET: "A friend with friends."

EZEKIEL: Please come in.

NARRATOR 1: The group steps into the Hunns' warm kitchen.

ELIZA: You must be tired from your long journey. We have food for you, and a place to lie down.

CATHERINE: We are so tired. Thank you for your kindness.

ELIZA: You can rest here all day. It's too dangerous to travel during daylight.

NARRATOR 2: As soon as night falls, Ezekiel loads the group into his wagon.

NARRATOR 1: He covers them with blankets and piles fruits and vegetables on top to hide them. He drives until it is almost light.

EZEKIEL: I must turn back here. Men are watching me, too. If you follow this road you can reach the next stop in two nights. Best of luck to you all.

### Scene 6

NARRATOR 2: Hours later, they are walking next to the road. Harriet senses that they are in danger.

HARRIET: We must stop here and cross the river.

JOHN: That's the wrong direction!

CATHERINE: I won't get in the freezing water. You're crazy!

HARRIET: You can't go back. None of you. They will whip you and make you tell them how we got away and who we stayed with. You will put everyone in jeopardy!

WILLIAM: She's right, Catherine. We have to stay together.

HARRIET: Come on. Follow me.

NARRATOR 1: Harriet starts to walk into the river. The water rises to her ankles, then her knees. Soon it's above her waist.

NARRATOR 2: Harriet keeps going. The others stand on the bank watching in disbelief.

BENJIE: Harriet, we're going to drown if we follow you!

NARRATOR 1: But Harriet has faith. Even when the water reaches her chin, she continues. At last, the river becomes shallow again.

NARRATOR 2: She reaches the other side, and the others step into the river to join her.

HARRIET: We'll be safe over here. Let's sleep for a few hours in the tall grass.

NARRATOR 1: The next morning, they find a path that leads them back to the road they were on the day before.

HARRIET: Look, the patrollers have been here looking for us.

BENJIE: How can you tell?

WILLIAM: The grass has been trampled by horses.

JOHN: And look at these cigar butts.

CATHERINE: Harriet, if we hadn't crossed the river when we did, we would have been caught!

### Scene 7

NARRATOR 2: After traveling for weeks, Harriet's group arrives in Pennsylvania. They go straight to the Anti-Slavery Society.

STILL: Welcome to Philadelphia.

WILLIAM: We are mighty happy to be here.

STILL I'm sorry to say that even though you are in a free state, you are not yet free.

BENJIE: Why is that?

HARRIET: Because the Fugitive Slave Law has been passed. Any runaway slave who is caught, even up North, can be arrested and sent back South.

JOHN: Where can we go to be truly free?

HARRIET: I will lead you all the way to Canada.

NARRATOR 1: Harriet brings her family safely to Canada, where they live the rest of their lives as free people.

### Scene 8

NARRATOR 2: Harriet becomes a conductor on the Underground Railroad.

NARRATOR 1: She repeatedly sneaks back to the South to lead groups of slaves to freedom.

NARRATOR 2: Slaveholders, angry that their slaves keep escaping, offer \$40,000 for Harriet's capture, dead or alive. That's equal to \$800,000 today.

NARRATOR 1: But Harriet is not afraid. Even though her parents are old and feeble, she is determined to bring them North.

NARRATOR 2: She sneaks back once again to the plantation in Maryland.

NARRATOR 1: A large sun bonnet hides her face, and she walks hunched over.

NARRATOR 2: Suddenly, she sees Doc Thompson, her old master, coming toward her.

NARRATOR 1: Harriet quickly lets go of the chickens she is holding. They start fluttering and squawking.

NARRATOR 2: Doc Thompson starts laughing.

DOC THOMPSON: Old woman, you best get your chickens rounded up.

NARRATOR 1: He doesn't even recognize her!

NARRATOR 2: Harriet breathes a sigh of relief and approaches her parents' house.

MA: Who is it?

HARRIET: It's Harriet.

MA: I didn't think I'd ever see you again!

HARRIET: I've come to take you and Pa up North.

MA: I don't know how we'll do it. My knees and my back are aching all the time. I can't walk so well.

HARRIET: Where's Pa?

MA: He's locked up in the chicken coop for helping another slave escape.

HARRIET: Don't you worry, I'll get him loose.

### Scene 9

NARRATOR 1: Harriet waits until nightfall and sneaks over to the chicken coop. She pries open the door.

HARRIET: Pa, I've come for you.

PA: Oh, thank you, my Harriet. I don't know what the master was going to do to me.

HARRIET: Quickly, we need to get a horse.

PA: Old Dollie Mae was put out to pasture. Let's take her.

HARRIET: I saw an old board by the cabin. We can rig up some wheels to it.

NARRATOR 2: Harriet and her father build a makeshift carriage.



MA: This is too dangerous, Harriet. We are sure to get caught.

HARRIET: We have to try. Don't you want to be free?

MA: That I do.

PA: Then climb aboard.

NARRATOR 1: Harriet drapes a shawl over her head and rides with her parents to the railroad station.

MA: Harriet, how are we going to get onto the train?

HARRIET: We walk right onto it and act like we're supposed to be there. Maybe they'll think we are free already.

PA: What will we do if people are suspicious?

HARRIET: Then we get off and head South for a while. No one will look for escaped slaves on a train heading South. Don't fret and worry, I've done this many times before.

MA: Harriet, I've never met a soul as brave as you.

### Epilogue

NARRATOR 2: Harriet brought her parents safely North. But her bravery didn't end there.

NARRATOR 1: Harriet was one of the few women to fight in the Civil War. She carried a rifle and commanded a band of nine men who were all spies for the Union Army.

NARRATOR 2: After the Civil War, when slaves were free, Harriet founded several schools for ex-slaves in New York. She died in 1913, at the age of 92.